Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to introduce to the English-speaking world this newly-translated volume concerning the "Twin Shining Lights," which is the title Bahá'u'lláh bestows in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf on the two brothers Áqá Mírzá Hasan and Áqá Mírzá Husayn of Isfahán, respectively the "King of Martyrs" and the "Beloved of Martyrs" – the twin foremost martyrs of the Bahá'í Dispensation. My pleasure derives indeed not just from the publication itself, which represents the fulfilment of a long-cherished wish on my part and that of others, but also from a number of attendant circumstances: namely, that it is, so far as I am aware, the first full-length monograph on this subject available to the English-speaking friends; that it is by the same token the first major work in English Bahá'í literature centring upon the important theme of martyrdom – a subject which, for better or for worse, has come to prominence in the world today, and which is of great significance to Bahá'ís too, though for entirely different reasons; that it is also, I believe, the first English rendering of an entire work of Eastern Bahá'í scholarship by a noted author in the field; that it assembles a veritable treasury of previously untranslated Writings, many of them profoundly moving, and including an extraordinary outpouring of laments for the martyrs from the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh – laments which, in their beauty, poignancy and sheer copiousness are like nothing that has so far been seen in English; but above all because, so it seems to me, the book touches upon a number of matters that are of the utmost relevance in the Bahá'í World today, affecting in different ways the Bahá'í communities of both the East and the West.

So far as the Eastern Bahá'í community is concerned, the book is valuable, I feel, for the guidance it offers on a number of matters of the most pressing concern to it today, as it faces the latest of the recurrent waves of persecution that have beset it since its birth.

First and foremost, it would not, I believe, be possible to read this book without experiencing a sense of amazement at the spirit of radiant acquiescence – nay, of eager enthusiasm – with which these towering heroes of the Bahá'í Dispensation, and others like them, approached their martyrdom, as though they were on their way to a wedding celebration, rather than to the scene of their own brutal demise. The text indeed makes clear that they had repeatedly craved of Bahá'u'lláh that their lives might be offered up for the Cause; that they allowed no word of blame to pass their lips against the agents of their destruction; and that they even strove with each other who should be the first to go.

Equally striking are the affirmations on the part of Bahá'u'lláh, interspersed throughout the numerous Tablets of which this book is composed, that it is precisely these periodic effusions of blood on the part of the Eastern believers which, deplorable as they are, have nevertheless been – as they still are – the very means by which the tree of the Cause is watered, and its growth fostered. According to other Tablets, the blood thus spilled out permeates in some strange manner the whole of existence, and continues to exert a mysterious influence in the world long after its victims have passed away.

Similarly striking is the attitude Bahá'u'lláh enjoins His hard-pressed followers to evince in the face of trials and calamities of this sort. So far from sanctioning any expressions of grievance, despondency or discontent on the part of the friends against such cruel blows – let alone recriminations or reproaches – it is manifestly clear from all the Tablets here assembled that they are called upon to accept in a spirit of "perfect resignation" whatever dire hardship they have been destined to sustain: nay more, to regard themselves as having thereby been singled out for an inestimable blessing! Yes, they are to practise wisdom, so as not to *court* disaster; yes, they are to take whatever practical measures may tend to deflect or alleviate impending calamity; yes, they are permitted to grieve for the victims of atrocities – but under no circumstances are they entitled to complain of their lot: and indeed there are one or two arresting passages in these Tablets where Bahá'u'lláh sharply rebukes those who had ventured to do so.

So much for the relevance of the work to the Eastern friends. But I think this book is of no less relevance to the Western friends, for the clear message it conveys in numerous passages is that the martyrdom for which the King and Beloved of Martyrs gained their position of pre-eminence amongst that blissful company was not one of the *flesh*, but above all one of the *spirit* – a martyrdom, in other words, that is still attainable today by the entire body of the followers of the Greatest Name, whether of the East or of the West, but whose arena is, I feel, one in which the latter, more than the former, are now called upon to display their mettle, to evince their heroism, and to seize the crown.

What then is the nature of this spiritual martyrdom – this "true martyrdom," as it is designated in one or two of the Tablets in this volume? There is one passage in particular, constituting in a way, I feel, the most lustrous of all the priceless gems scattered throughout its pages, which eloquently elucidates this question:

> O ‘Alí! Do thou meditate upon the Light that shone forth from the Land of Sád.[1] Till now most people have not acquired so much as a sprinkling from the ocean of his understanding. He had attained unto the true martyrdom. By My life! Years passed over him during which he was wholly selfless in the Will of his Lord, and in the Purpose of His Master. In no respect had he any thought, purpose, or will of his own; and at all times did he wait upon the Command of God. Without the leave and permission of the True One he embarked upon no enterprise. For years indeed he had already been a sacrifice in the path of the Beloved, although to outward seeming he spoke, heard, and walked like others. This is the Supreme Sacrifice, the Most Sublime Station, and the Most August Seat; and this exalted and most glorious station was crowned with outward martyrdom. He gleaned the pearls of the ocean of life, and cast them at the feet of the Beloved.[2]

The essence of martyrdom, as it is here so beautifully defined, is at once the simplest – and yet the most difficult and perplexing! – of all matters: namely, to conform one’s will to the Will of God, and without question; without Why or Wherefore; without the least hesitation or demur, quietly and unassumingly to do His bidding. It might seem in theory simple enough: but which of us, with our Western education (and this now includes many of Iranian descent reared in the West) – schooled as we all have been to question everything as a matter of course; to take for granted that our own opinions, tastes and prepossessions are sovereign; and to regard any act of “submission” on our part as an intolerable surrender of our “freedom,” is practically capable of doing this? When a particular measure is proposed by the authorities, however beneficial it might eventually prove to be, do not a host of reasons at once crowd into our minds why it would be improper, impractical, inexpedient, unconscionable, inconceivable? How difficult it is for us, in our turbulent headstrong adolescence, not simply to decry authority for no better reason than that it *is* the authority, to which we are as yet loath to bow our heads.

The problem is bound up finally with what, surely, is the ultimate challenge the Bahá'í Faith addresses to us at the individual level, as indeed at that of the whole world, which is to win the victory over our own selves; to leave behind once and for all that clamorous, assertive, refractory lower nature with which we are all initially endowed – the very image of the disobedient child! – and, like the King and the Beloved of Martyrs, to resolve instead to fulfil ourselves,

[1] Isfahán.
[2] See the Tablet addressed to ‘Alí in Section Five, page 91.

and in the process attain true joy and realize the very purpose of our existence, in humble, implicit, unrepining obedience to His command.

> Arise, O people, and, by the power of God's might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies – gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of, their wretched worshipers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection. We cherish the hope that the Hand of Divine power may lend its assistance to mankind, and deliver it from its state of grievous abasement.[3]

The heroism, the nobility, the transcendence of such an accomplishment, however underrated and insignificant it may as yet be in the eyes of the world, are, I think, fully conveyed by its identification in this volume as the *spiritual reality of martyrdom*.

Some comments now about the book itself. Although, as I have mentioned, it represents in a sense the first-full length rendering of a work of Eastern Bahá'í scholarship, and so belongs to a tradition standing in many respects in stark contrast to the canons of Western academic research – as for example in its unquestioned *commitment* to the truth of the Cause; its intensely respectful approach to the Central and outstanding figures of the Faith; its rather ornate and ceremonious diction; its close familiarity with Eastern, and particularly Islamic, culture; its slightly digressive quality – I am still hesitant to call it a work of *scholarship*. For to me this is a book of the *heart* rather than of the *head*; and its importance, as I hope I have indicated in the preceding, is at the *moral*, not at the *intellectual*, level. It seems that the compiler of the document, Mr. 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, a prolific Bahá'í author who flourished during the last century,[4] and to whom the Eastern Bahá'í communities are indebted for numerous works, mostly in the form of translations, compilations, or encyclopaedic treatments of different kinds, composed it during a trip he made to Isfahán. Having been trained as a member of the clergy, he was, after becoming a Bahá'í, turned upon by his former colleagues, and quite literally hounded from one Iranian city to another. These less than ideal conditions for scholarship appear to be reflected in certain features of the original work: in its slightly loose construction, and in the various irregularities in point of detail by which the original text is marked, all of which have been rectified in the present translation. As a matter of fact the author, as will be seen from his own Introduction, makes no pretence to have compiled a

[3] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Selection XLIII, p. 93.
[4] 1902-72.

scholarly or definitive study of the subject, but only to have made a preliminary collection of material for incorporation into a more detailed and comprehensive volume at some future stage. The resulting work is in consequence like nothing so much as a *scrapbook*; and I would suggest that if it be approached with this in mind; if the readers will graciously set aside all preconceptions about what constitutes a work of scholarship, but simply prepare to be enthralled, moved, delighted – even thrilled – by a constant parade of the most fascinating material, rendered all the more interesting by its being ever unexpected, then they stand to derive the greatest benefit from it.

Among the wealth of interesting material comprised in the volume, apart from the aforementioned Tablets, I would note especially the charming ode in Section One composed by Nabíl to mark the nuptials of the Most Great Branch; a stirring letter in the same section addressed by Táhirih to the father of Munírih Khánum, in which she calls upon him to proclaim the Faith to the father of the Twin Shining Lights; a very striking Tablet in Section Six revealed by the Master for the grand-daughter of the Beloved of Martyrs, Rúhá Khánum, less than one week before His passing; a kind of ingenious acrostic rhyme occurring in the footnote to the piece by Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl in Section Nine, which encapsulates in verse the year of his passing; and the two facsimile letters at the very end of the volume written by the King and the Beloved of Martyrs themselves.

I have from an early age been fascinated by the figures of the Twin Shining Lights; most especially by their remarkable feat, rare by any standard, of perfectly balancing success and distinction in both the secular and the spiritual realms. It was a member of the martyrs' family, the late Mrs. Furúgh Maghzí, who initially proposed to me the idea of translating *The Twin Shining Lights*, and I have since then been seeking by divers means to realize her wish, in which endeavour I have at length been successful. My chief collaborator in this undertaking, to whom I am principally indebted, has requested to remain anonymous, citing the statement in one of the Tablets in the volume "Being without name or trace is a token of the sublimest majesty, " and I accordingly accede to this request. Thereafter I wish to extend grateful thanks to the Bahá'í World Centre for verifying the texts and translations of all Scriptural passages, and for carrying out further indispensable research relating to the matters treated of in the volume; to Dr. Ahang Rabbání for his support and encouragement throughout this project; to Dr. Amanollah Missaghi and Dr. Muhammad Afnan for their help in deciphering the text of the two facsimile letters of the King and the Beloved of Martyrs; and of course

to the publishers for the splendid job they have done in preparing the volume for publication.

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